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Talk. They hear you.

Eau Claire, Wisconsin – April 6, 2015.

The Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention is kicking off the seventh annual Parents Who Host Campaign, and the theme is, “Talk. They Hear You.” Parents should talk to their kids about alcohol because 80% of youth aged 10-18 say their parents are the leading influence on their decision regarding whether or not to drink, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. “Knowing how strong parental influence is for kids should give parents both hope and confidence” says Kristin Hildebrand of the Alliance.

According to Erica Emmerson, a health educator in Altoona, “Parents shouldn't underestimate the impact their words have on the choices their children make.” Experts now recommend starting to talk with your kids about alcohol as early as 3rd or 4th grade. Why? Because kids in Eau Claire County report their first use of alcohol happening at an average age of 13. Talking with kids before they begin to experiment with alcohol is important, and it allows your guidance to be part of their internal conversation.

Underage drinking is unhealthy, unsafe, and illegal. “As public safety professionals, we feel that one of our most important partners are parents,” says Eau Claire Police Chief Jerry Staniszewski, “It is essential that parents have conversations about drugs and alcohol with their kids at an early age. When parents are actively involved in teaching their child how to make the right decisions, involvement in high-risk behaviors is greatly reduced.” Talking with your kids today can protect them from potential harm well into the future.

In addition to talking, parents working to keep their kids safe and healthy have tools to help each other. Over 850 Eau Claire County parents already belong to the Parents Connecting Network. Members receive a directory and are encouraged to call each other, compare notes, and ensure youth gatherings are monitored. Bruce King is a member and feels “The directory is a strong resource for parents to connect with other parents and exchange ideas on how to keep alcohol away from our kids. This is the best possible ‘peer pressure’, because the message is coming from parents, who have their children’s best interests at heart.” Information on how to join the Network can be found on the Alliance website (www.getinvolvedASAP.org).

“Parents have a unique opportunity to be the first people to discuss with their children the dangers of abusing any sort of substances,” according to Assistant State Defender Patrick Waters. Recalling his own parents’ approach he states, “I can thank my parents for addressing substance abuse with me at a very young age, and I know that it made a big difference in my decisions.”

As part of this year’s Parents Who Host campaign, parents and other adults are asked to:

- Talk to their kids about the risks of underage drinking
- Monitor youth gatherings in their home
- Use resources from the Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention found at www.getinvolvedASAP.com
- Get connected with over 850 Parents Connecting Network members

This year’s *Parents Who Host Lose the Most Campaign* is a county-wide effort sponsored by the Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention. The Alliance, at the Eau Claire City-County Health Department, is a coalition working to improve the lives of children, youth, and adults by mobilizing communities to prevent and treat alcohol, tobacco, and other drug abuse in Eau Claire County. The Alliance includes members from Altoona, Augusta, Eau Claire, and Fall Creek. The Drug Free Communities Program provides federal funding for this campaign. *Parents Who Host Lose the Most: Don’t be a party to teenage drinking* was developed by the Drug-Free Action Alliance in Ohio. “*Talk. They Hear You*” is a campaign developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

To become involved in efforts to reduce underage drinking, please contact Kristin Hildebrand at Kristin.hildebrand@co.eau-claire.wi.us or 715-839-2874.

